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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC IV
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: GBAGBO ISSUES COMBATIVE STATEMENT

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) On April 25 President Gbagbo issued a statement through his press spokesman laying out his views on how the country should move forward toward elections. The statement was typical of Gbagbo: combative, defensive, disingenuous and hardly presidential. Gbagbo denied that he had agreed at the April 8 meeting of Ivoirian political leaders with AU Chairman Sassou that identification of citizens and disarmament should proceed simultaneously. He called that meeting a "lecture" given by Sassou and noted that no signed agreement or communique resulted from it. Gbagbo questioned the "common sense and logic" of trying to identify citizens in the north when war has "massively displaced" the population there, and rebels who have committed "massacres, excesses, acts of humiliation and all sorts of torture" continue to "run wild." However, since these matters come under the authority of the prime minister, Gbagbo said he would accept simultaneous identification and disarmament.

¶2. (C) Also typically for Gbagbo, the statement went on at length to assert that he, and only he, has carried out all the commitments made in the various Ivoirian peace agreements, while others have implemented these agreements "cunningly and dishonestly." He referred in particular to paragraph 6 of the Pretoria II agreement, which he said withdrew from the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) any authority to register voters. Rather, Gbagbo asserted, the Pretoria II agreement gives this authority to the National Institute of Statistics (INS), which is only required to report its actions to the CEI. (Note: In fact, the relevant sentence of Pretoria II reads, "The leaders reaffirmed that the IEC is the sole institution in charge of the electoral process and the National Institute of Statistics should report to the IEC on matters relating to the elections.") He asserted furthermore that the voter registration list is "permanent" and only needs to be updated, and that to seek to establish a new list would be to call into question all of the previous peace agreements and require their renegotiation.

¶3. (C) Comment. The "permanent" voter list Gbagbo is referring to is the one that was used in the elections that brought him to power as president and gave his FPI (Ivoirian Popular Front) party control of the National Assembly in 2000. The opposition has claimed since before those elections were even held that many opposition supporters, especially northerners, were excluded from that list. If the voter registration process were to be truly transparent and fully inclusive it would not matter whether the previous list was updated or a new list was prepared: the outcome would be the same. However, by insisting that registration must remain in the hands of the INS, which is controlled by Gbagbo cronies, he is conceding that the only way he can win the election is by cooking the voter registration list. End

Comment.

Hooks